



# ISSANJI

## HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER

57 Hartford Street, San Francisco, California, 94114. (415) 863-2507

– SUMMER 1996 –

HSZC is a neighborhood Zen Temple offering a regular practice schedule in the Castro district. It is also called Issanji, "One Mountain Temple", after its founder Issan Dorsey Roshi. The center was started in 1980 to provide a practice place for gay men, lesbians and other sentient beings. In residence is Abbot Zenshin Philip Whalen, who supervises practice and teaching. Zenshin is available for dokusan (practice interviews) to answer questions and discuss student's practice. Please make appointments with him in advance.

### LIVING AND DYING

Abbot Zenshin Philip Whalen

Life and death. That's what it's really about. We live in the midst of dying and die in the midst of living... We go through our lives picking up all kinds of things and calling it 'me'. We become very fond of this creation – life and inanimate matter all glued together...

I live at HSZC. There is a hospice here for folks living with AIDS. Everyone is perishing slowly. I can understand a little bit what they are going through, that the end is not far away, because I am not well myself. Guys who are there and terribly ill are alive and know what is happening – that it's the end of the moving – if you stop moving you are dead.

It's very real when we watch friends fade and perish. Very difficult because we want to keep things as they are. But unless you experience your own death – you are lost. Really get close to it. What we are actually doing is dying all the time. Dying is an action. Ask, "Who is living? Who is dying?" And when you go to the Zendo ask, "Why

am I here?"

The business of "just sitting" is very difficult. Zen wants you to rip yourself to pieces. We sit down, fold our legs and watch breath. Sit on a cushion being bored stiff. Then our mind starts flashing ugly pictures, sad feelings, weird ideas, and our knees hurt. We are attacking the structure of the personality, the casing, so we get distracted from what practice is about.

What are the reasons why we do zazen? The reason is that we are greedy for satori, for enlightenment and for friends to say "Hey I couldn't do that!" Keep asking – "What is it I am doing? What am I responding to? How am I acting with others and how do they act with me?" All we know is mush – a gray field where we try to get away or closer. All we may have learned through sitting is to handle our own intolerance or impatience. But in the life of Zen practice you shouldn't come out alive.

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Myo asked me this morning, "What is the answer to it all?" And I said,

"Love". In one of our secret esoteric Zen circles, at the bottom of the whole shebang is Buddha's compassion – to save all beings. A passionate drive to end the suffering of stars, fish, people and everything.



Philip Whalen



## HSZC NEWS

At the April Board Meeting, HSZC Treasurer **Don Herald** reported that membership dues were down considerably. A membership drive was proposed since HSZC depends on regular contributions from members for temple survival. **David Prowler** suggested taking donations between zazen and service. "We could position a big guy with a collection bucket at the bottom of the Zendo stairs. Sitters will have to buy their way out of staying for service!"

Seriously though, *if you sit here regularly or just occasionally, and care about maintaining our practice place, please consider pledging a regular donation.*

Other traditional sources of income for temples are funerals and weddings. **Shunko** especially likes doing funerals, "because people can't come back and complain."

HSZC Temple signs for the front entrance: **Myo** said the wood for the signs is seasoning nicely. We are very fortunate in having a sign with the official name of our temple, Issanji, in Chinese characters written by the notable artist and calligrapher, **Kazuaki Tanahashi**.

**Policy about Other Groups Meeting here:** Myo asked that they not arrive before 7:30 pm since he's busy restoring the zendo after evening sitting.

**Zenshin's Book Signing Party:** On April 27<sup>th</sup> **Zenshin** lectured at Page Street Zen Center in connection with the publication of his book of Zen poetry, *Canoeing up Cabarga Creek*. Zen Center president **Michael Wenger** introduced our Abbot to the crowded hall of pillow riders, "Some may know him as Philip Whalen, poet and cultural hero, while others know him as Zen Master Zenshin which means Zen Heart-mind."

**Zenshin** will perform a lay ordination ceremony (Jukai) for **Lynne Menefee** on June 29<sup>th</sup>.

The San Francisco Mindfulness Community (**Thich Nhat Hanh's** students) held a Mindfulness Day at HSZC in April. Over fifty participants enjoyed the day of sitting and walking meditation, a Dharma Talk, discussion and a silent lunch and tea. They held walking meditations in the back garden and around the neighborhood. Dharma teachers **Arnie Kotler** and **Therese Fitzgerald** led the practice.

At the May Board meeting **Abbot Zenshin** announced that he wished to resign in August due to failing health. The Board met on Sunday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, to review the implications of his decision for HSZC. We

began with a period of zazen, then met upstairs to talk. **Zenshin** offered to continue lecturing and teaching, but asked to retire from daily maintenance of the temple schedule.

**Zenshin** briefed us on the traditional role of abbot in Japanese Zen temples: "A nobleman or local overlord decides to build a temple as a memorial to one of his parents. He commands his retainers to build a temple whose construction is funded by himself and other family members. The heads of families among the retainers become the hereditary supporters of the temple.

"The overlord then selects an abbot (religious leader) who in turn appoints six officers, who are monks, to operate the temple; director, treasurer, guest manager, head cook, head of construction, and Ino (who leads ceremonies). These officers meet with the Abbot to figure out the monastic schedule, ceremonies, etc. The Abbot puts the official seal on legal papers, teaches and initiates. It's a funny system, very un-American. The Abbot names a successor before death, writes a poem, then dies. Here in America people do whatever they can – it's the democratic tradition."

It was proposed that since HSZC is such a small operation, with primarily a lay sangha, it would be more practical to have a head priest in the interim rather than an abbot. The Board can reconsider whether or not to install an abbot at some future date. In the meantime, a practice committee will be set up to operate the Zendo and maintain the meditation schedule. "The bottom line," said **Shunko**, "is to encourage people to practice."

The Board then explored the different gifts HSZC temple had to offer the neighborhood. **Ken Ireland** described HSZC as, "a neighborhood Zen temple, a funky, ragtag place with many practice opportunities for people because it's not so well-defined." **Myo** shared his experience from years at San Francisco Zen Center where hundreds of people pass through. "When people get a feeling for what Zen training entails – exposing our tenderest places to scrutiny – they don't always like it. For a place like HSZC, people who want that very precious thing should be able to find it, but we should also provide a way for others to practice so they can keep more distance if they wish."

Our **Annual Member's Meeting** will be held on Sunday, July 7<sup>th</sup>, from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm. We will discuss options for encouraging the practice at HSZC to flourish, and Voting Members will elect a few additional Board Members.



## INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN TOOLE

*Brian Toole, Doshin Tetsugen (Way Heart-mind Penetrating the Source), was a resident at Maitri AIDS hospice for 3 months. He died on Mother's Day with family and friends in attendance. He mentioned that rebirth in Brazil would be nice which his family noted that Brian was prepared for, since he'd recently learned Portuguese. The Memorial service was led by Lou Hartman at San Francisco Zen Center on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Brian's life, love, family and teaching touched us all deeply. Return soon, we miss you.*

**Brian:** I first became involved with Buddhism in 1985 through Issan. I met him at the house of a mutual friend over Chinese New Year's dinner. Issan told me he was the head priest at a little Zen temple and invited me to drop by. I had been practicing on and off for years in different traditions and ways but not Zen. So I went over to HSZC and Issan showed me the Zendo (meditation hall). It was my first time in a Zendo, and I was really impressed with its feeling, perhaps because of its basement location in an old Victorian.

Issan was dedicated to the Zendo, so he had a schedule and he was always welcoming more people into the space. Issan's management style was quite Taoist – just leave things go, let the world express itself without putting on rules and times. It was amazing to see, always room for more people, but overwhelming for me.

I started going to City Zen Center because they offered classes and training programs that weren't available here. I sat sesshin at City Center in 1988, then again in the spring at Green Gulch. In 1990, I moved into City Center and was hired as property manager. It was good to work and practice there and I stayed seven months. Then I moved across the street and lived with a Brazilian man, Tony, who was really sick and died around the same time as Issan. After, I went to Tassajara for one year. Then my back seized in major spasms and I had to leave.

I returned to City Zen Center for a while and worked on the managerial crew. During this time I took Jukai with Abbot Mel Weitsman and received the name "Doshin Tetsugen." "Doshin" means "the mind of the Tao" and "Tetsugen" means "piercing reality or penetrating the source." It's a great name, a gift from Mel that I've been unable to live up to. But that's the

whole idea, the name describes your potential, not necessarily how you are now.

Eventually I moved to a flat across the street and was living there when I got my first HIV-related pneumonia. I realized that part of my problem was too much stress; there is a lot of crime in that neighborhood and victimization was inevitable. So I relocated to Upper Haight Street. But then it got to where I couldn't take care of myself anymore. I've had chronic pneumonia, either PCP or bacterial, the past two years, and debilitating fatigue. It was difficult to get out from my third floor apartment.

I wanted to find housing in the Castro because that's where all my activities were – meditation, acupuncture and the AIDS Health Project – but looking for an apartment when one has pneumonia all the time and no energy was difficult. That got me thinking about my situation. I was sick all the time, lungs giving out, couldn't keep going like this. So I applied to some hospices and came here in February.

Living in a hospice, one day turns into another, you're in a kind of timeless realm. Yet there is so much life here, people coming and going and doing real things for people – it can get to a feverish pitch! It's a very high-voltage act people are doing and that energy translates into a very useful group. Some find it distracting or inappropriate – heated conversations don't seem to go along with their ideas or state of mind about death.

But then Maitri doesn't exactly follow the institutional hospice model where people walk softly, with no stray sounds, where patients are related to in very hushed tones. I just love the energy of people here, very refreshing, especially if you are young and still have some energy and health. I actually trained to do hospice work in 1993 and was a volunteer.

**Jennifer:** Does having a meditation practice make it easier to be intimate with dying?

**Brian:** I think so, I certainly hope so, but one never knows. Some people might think they're really prepared for death, but then they're not. Others worry about it constantly, but when its time to be done they do it gracefully. So it doesn't pay to spend too much time thinking about dying actually, there doesn't seem to be any value in getting tied up with that question.

Meditation is a good tool to have for someone who has problems with breathing – to breathe and be aware of the breath. I can tell by what goes on in the Zendo each night whether I have more or less pneumonia, and what location the infection is in. And the nondual practice of Zen is very useful, not putting



labels on things – experiencing their suchness.

**Jennifer:** You are involved with the Native American tradition.

**Brian:** I received the name "Coati", which is a tree-climbing mammal in Southwest Mexico with a long prehensile tail. I got this name when I was in the Dakota's on a reservation where I used to climb trees all the time... I'm interested in the whole primitive cultural renaissance we are now experiencing in the West – the revival of the old ways and wisdom of the shamans. In the pictures of old Indian chiefs I see looks of extreme self-mastery... To me, Buddhism is part of this whole primal urge towards understanding, part of that whole stream of consciousness. This wisdom doesn't belong to any one culture, it belongs to everyone.

**Jennifer:** You've been involved with different kinds of AIDS Organizations...

**Brian:** I've sat on panels for death and dying seminars at Zen Center Hospice, and also forums for pharmaceutical people. I represent someone with a life-threatening illness and answer people's questions about what that means to me. Buddhist practitioners tend to ask about my relationship to practice in this process. While someone not in practice usually asks: "How does it feel to be a hospice patient? And how do you feel about the disease?" If you live with this (HIV) long enough, it becomes pretty normal. Even when you're really sick and stuck in bed, it becomes just another way of living.

## MAITRI AIDS HOSPICE NEWS

**Relocation Update:** A big kick-off party and Zen Buddhist ceremony of dedication for Maitri's new location at 401 Duboce was held June 21<sup>st</sup>. This event was sponsored and planned by Maitri's Development Committee, under the direction of **Diane Purgiel**.

The Redevelopment Agency Commission unanimously approved an additional \$422,000 funding for Maitri's new site. This leaves a capital campaign target of about \$1 million to be raised through donations and gifts. Meanwhile the construction bids are still over budget, so adjustments are being made to the design.

**Staff:** Executive Director **George Hurd** resigned May 15<sup>th</sup> and **Tové** created a "hippie love den" party

to send George off in style. His vision and drive will be missed. **Maura Singer-Williams** and **Tové Beatty** are handling the day-to-day office operations, while **Diane Purgiel** is focusing on relocation and working hard on the capital campaign drive.

**Timothy Wolfred** was hired as Maitri's Interim Executive Director to help guide Maitri through completion of the reconstruction process. He has extensive experience as an interim executive director for a number of Bay Area AIDS organizations. Tim also coordinates the Asian AIDS Project.

New cook **Sherie** is getting rave reviews.

**Volunteers:** Orientation Day for new volunteers was held May 4<sup>th</sup>. **Ken Ireland** spoke about Maitri's origins and present activities. Another Orientation Day is scheduled for July 13<sup>th</sup>, and **Shunko** has been invited to tell more about Maitri's history.

Upcoming VNH Hospice Volunteer Training for new volunteers interested in hands-on resident support: This training includes instruction in bedside care as well as discussions of issues encountered in this work. Please call **Tové** at 863-8508 for further information on both events.

**Residents:** Welcome to new residents **Irving** and **Gabriel**, who arrived in May. Warm spring weather birthed the "porch people" phenomena on the front steps of Maitri – **Rick** with his portable phone, mellow **Howie**, perceptive **Fred** and intense **Tony** – blessing the neighborhood with their presence while commenting on physiquos and auras of passersby.

**Tony** expressed interest in learning about "the zendoism that those skinheads practice," so **Myo** is giving him instruction on how to hold his hands and count breaths. **Tony's** work in the "real world" was computer programming – taking bugs out of software – and he'd love to get his hands on a computer again. When **Howie** was asked how he liked living at Maitri, he replied, "It's like living in a loony bin and we are all inmates! It's like Ken Kesey's "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."

Wheelchair ramps created by **Snooky** the handyman were set up on the front steps and between the nurses station and the dining room, making it easier to transport residents in wheelchairs. Please take a moment to remember **Beau** and his dog **Herschel** (who died a week after Beau in a fatal rabbit chasing incident), **Raven**, **Santiago**, **Ken**, **James**, and **Brian**. May they be free from suffering.



## MEMBER'S FORUM

alt.sangha.flame

*Your letters, comments, and ideas are welcomed. Next newsletter deadline, September 1<sup>st</sup>. Contact Jennifer Birkett (415) 647-0465, or write c/o HSZC.*

### Renewing my Refuge

by George Gayuski, "Ei Ko Chi Ji", (Unchanging, Joyous Earth Holder), or "Gyurme Sadzin".

These last two weeks have been a whirlwind. In the middle of preparing to renew my Refuge and Precept Vows with Zen Center, (originally taken with Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche when only a pup), I was diagnosed (finally, after 14 years of being HIV+) with a typically very aggressive lymphoma. It has already made significant advances in spite of our catching it early by "accident".

Suddenly I had some twenty appointments within two weeks; my primary physician, CT scan, the oncologist, lung X-rays, blood draws (seemed like half a gallon), labs, and doubling up on my therapy appointments. (So excellent to have a true Buddhist priest as a therapist!). Also trying to raise a Tibetan doctor. But all this is nothing new for way too many people.

The aspect of all this that struck me as pleasingly ironic is that it all seems to be grounded in a calm, composed and basic sanity. The kindnesses and unending demonstrations of support from my friends adds a very potent dimension of ease to the whole situation. And thank heavens for the Zen Hospice Retreat in early April and for that time at Tassajara last summer!

I have been spending my early morning quiet time studying the lectures of Trungpa Rinpoche and Suzuki Roshi on the Three Treasures and the Precepts. Each day the Three Treasures seem to reveal themselves repeatedly; trust and calm – the fruition from living the precepts. Something unspeakable seems to be stirring far below the level of thought or conception. Ordinary "necessities", goals and references disappear as totally irrelevant; how interesting at the least! Perhaps even delightful.

I've been trying to convey to my physicians my perspective about quality of life. I tell them that dramatic efforts to fight (they call it heroic) and cling to some kind of tortured existence does not appeal to me. This seems to take the doctors off guard for only a moment and in their next breath they begin again making a case for chemo. Then in the next breath after they tell me of chemo's side effects – destruction of bone marrow and white blood cells leaving you open to all kinds of new infections and probably hospitalization. I already know about this; a close friend is suffering this now and is not really alive at all.

Chuang Tsu jumped off the page the other evening, saying it for me: "How do I know that loving life is not a delusion? How do I know that in hating death I am not

like a man who, having left home in his youth, has forgotten the way back?... How do I know that the dead do not wonder why they ever longed for life?"

For months I've been sitting with something I came upon by a Theravadan monk: "If you can see being born and not being born as equal, being sick and not being sick as equal, dying and not dying as equal, as having the same price, then the mind can relax and not be caught up on anything at all."

Then Dogen arrived via e-mail from a friend:

A white heron  
on the snowfield  
where winter grass is unseen  
hides itself  
in its own figure."

A few practical housekeeping items still need completion. Perhaps a very small chemo treatment will get me to August when Dr. Yeshe Dhonden Rinpoche arrives on a trip from India. Chemo negotiations continue, trying to stave off the oncologist. Ah! Three Tibetan doctors just appeared late last week; Tibetan medicine arriving by priority overnight mail from Massachusetts. My urine being FedExed to the East Coast. Mundane, sublime and ridiculous!

Especially those gestures from my Dharma brothers and sisters have served to nourish my refreshingly ordinary yet somehow profound sense of acceptance and everyday stuff; my personal sense of joy somehow undiminished. Surprising. This came into focus yesterday at the Jukai ceremony. Shunbo Zenkei Blanche Hartman's poem on my Rakusu:

Piercing the sky,  
Embracing the earth  
– No end to it.  
My single peal of laughter  
Startles heaven and earth.

It seems that people don't realize the power of their own compassion. Perhaps this is like practice; we do it from our heart and with a sense of trust, but actually its true dimension and effect is something well beyond any capacity to perceive it.

The other day it was time again to brave cross-town San Francisco rush hour traffic for yet another appointment. Start your engines! Snapped on the radio, it was set to a station I listen to sometimes – to refresh my memory of an earlier, seemingly more innocent time when savoring my raging hormones. An old upbeat disco tune by Ashford and Simpson (how absurd!):

"Found a cure!  
Ooooh, for your heartache  
Before you wake, before you wake,  
Don't take no medicine,  
Just take a little of this...  
Whatever it is, love will fix it  
It'll take away the tears  
And That ain't all you get  
For all your hopes and empty dreams."

As they often say at Zen Center, perhaps (love) is not exactly the right word...

## GROUPS MEETING AT HSZC

**SAN FRANCISCO MINDFULNESS COMMUNITY:** Students of Thich Nhat Hanh. 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, 9:30 am to noon. Monday nights, 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm. Contact: **Avi Magidoff** at (415) 252-8452.

**DHARMA SISTERS:** Not currently meeting.

## HSZC SCHEDULE

**MORNING:** Monday to Saturday.

Zazen 5:00 am to 5:40 am.

Kinhen 5:40 am to 5:50 am.

Zazen 5:50 am to 6:30 am, followed by Service

**EVENING:** Monday to Friday.

Zazen 6:00 pm to 6:40 pm, followed by Service.

**SATURDAY:** Informal Zazen 9:10 am to 10:00 am. You may enter any time before 10:00 am. DHARMA TALK by Abbot Zenshin Whalen at 10:00 am, followed by tea and discussion. Donation appreciated.

**MONDAY:** Introduction to Zazen and ZENDO practice forms at 5:00 pm. Call for appointment.

**DINNER:** Dinner is open to the community MONDAY night after zazen. \$5 donation suggested.

**MONTHLY MEMORIAL SERVICE:** A memorial service is held for Temple Founder, Issan Dorsey Roshi, on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of each month.

**ZENDO PROTOCOL:** Arrive at least 5 minutes before zazen. Bow as you enter the sitting area and when crossing in front of the altar. Once seated and the bell has rung, be as still as possible.

**MEMBERSHIP:** Practicing Members sit regularly, may attend dokusan with Zenshin, and contribute a suggested \$40/month. Those who wish to support the temple are encouraged to become Annual Members at \$20/year and will receive newsletters by mail.

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